

# Briefing Paper

## Rebuilding Lives: The need for sustainable livelihoods after trafficking

### Introduction

The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) believes that the impact of anti-trafficking initiatives is best understood from the perspective of trafficked persons themselves. This, according to us, is central to a human rights-based approach to anti-trafficking. To date, very little research has been done to consult trafficked people on the assistance services and to seek their comments on the efficacy of the services they received, or needed, but did not receive.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in 2013, 17 GAATW Member Organisations across Latin America, Europe, and Asia undertook a participatory research project to look at their own assistance work from the perspective of trafficked persons. GAATW members interviewed 121 women, men and girls who lived through trafficking to find out about their experience of assistance interventions and their recovery process after trafficking. The project aimed to make the assistance programmes more responsive to the needs of the clients and to initiate a process of accountability on the part of all anti-trafficking organisations and institutions.

Many trafficked persons left home with the desire to improve their economic situation and that of their families. Factors such as family responsibility, economic needs and the pressure of debt, a lack of adequate job options, and a desire for social status and respect, triggered them to migrate. Thus, it is not surprising that their primary concerns after trafficking centre on these very same factors. For many, their economic situation had further deteriorated as a result of trafficking. To rebuild life after trafficking a sustainable livelihood is paramount. That is, having access to a reasonable and sustainable standard of living, with economic opportunities such as employment and education.<sup>2</sup> Next to social and emotional support, economic empowerment of trafficked persons -equipping them with 'the skills, resources and confidence to economically

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<sup>1</sup> C Rijken, J van Dijk and F Klerx-Van Mierlo, *Mensenhandel: Het slachtofferperspectief (Human Trafficking: The victim's perspective)*, International Victimology Institute Tilburg (INTERVICT), Tilburg, 2013, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> A Lisborg, *Re-thinking Reintegration: What do returning victims really want and need? Evidence from Thailand and the Philippines*, SIREN report, GMS-07, 28 August 2009, retrieved 14 July 2015, [http://www.no-trafficking.org/reports\\_docs/siren/GMS-07\\_rethinking\\_reintegration.pdf](http://www.no-trafficking.org/reports_docs/siren/GMS-07_rethinking_reintegration.pdf);  
R Surtees, *Re/integration of Trafficked Persons: Supporting economic empowerment*, King Baudouin Foundation (KBF) and NEXUS Institute, 2012, retrieved 14 July 2015, [https://nexushumantrafficking.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/nexus\\_economic-empowerment.pdf](https://nexushumantrafficking.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/nexus_economic-empowerment.pdf)

support themselves and their families’- is crucial to their recovery, and to their economic and social inclusion following a trafficking experience.<sup>3</sup>

This briefing paper is one of three in which we set out the main findings of what people who have been trafficked say about certain themes.<sup>4</sup> It presents what trafficked persons say about their need for sustainable livelihoods, and the assistance they received to get on with life after trafficking. This paper is not meant to provide a final word or guideline on this theme. Rather, we are sharing it in the spirit that we would like to improve our own practice; with the intention to include the voices of trafficked persons into our work.

## Rebuilding lives

**“What I needed more rather than food and shelter was a job.”**

Nepali interviewee in Nepal

Researchers asked interviewees what helped, or would have helped them, to get on with life after trafficking. Across the board, trafficked persons consistently emphasised the importance of rewarding livelihoods with secure incomes, above other assistance needs.

The sections below outline the main issues regarding the need for sustainable livelihoods of trafficked persons in the research project. Firstly, some general comments are made on the importance of sustainable livelihoods to rebuild lives. Then, differences are discussed between rebuilding lives in the country of origin, or in the destination (or again another) country. Subsequently, the paper presents experiences and opinions of interviewees with services on offer: vocational and skills training; education; setting up a business; and finding options elsewhere through remigration respectively. The paper ends with recommendations.

### The importance of rewarding livelihoods with secure incomes

When asked what they needed most to rebuild their lives after having experienced trafficking, many of those interviewed in the project emphasised jobs, money, and developing new skills that would lead to more rewarding livelihoods with secure incomes. These were highlighted above other assistance needs. The factors that lead persons’ migration to begin with remain the most pressing factors after the experience of being trafficked, despite traumas suffered. Several studies have revealed that trafficked persons emphasize future livelihood possibilities and economic independence more than delving into exploitation traumas, and more than a desire to return to things as they were before migration.<sup>5</sup>

Also, economic independence is not just about survival and meeting basic needs. When returning to their homes or to a new community in their country of origin, the interviewees viewed economic independence as a vital step towards acceptance by families and inclusion in society. Having not earned wages during their migrant labour, going back “empty-handed” was a great source of worry; not only because they did not meet the expectations and responsibilities of their family but, in some cases, because of negative attitudes or stigma in the community. Women who had returned to Nepal after being trafficked into the sex sector explained that their communities tended to ignore the stigma associated with sex work if women returned with money. Interviewees told GAATW Member Organisations that having economic independence increased

<sup>3</sup> R Surtees, *After Trafficking: Experiences and challenges in the (re)integration of trafficked persons in the Greater Mekong Sub-region*, UNIAP/NEXUS Institute, 2013, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> The titles of the briefing papers are: *Unmet Needs: Emotional support and care after trafficking*; *Seeking feedback from trafficked persons on assistance services: Principles and Ethics*; and *Rebuilding Lives: The need for sustainable livelihoods after trafficking*.

<sup>5</sup> A Lisborg

confidence, built resilience to stigmatising behaviour from the community, and was both individually and socially empowering.

**“I don't care what people say that insult...  
I forgot the problem, I am happy and I've got a job.”**

Indonesian interviewee in Indonesia

Trafficked persons who do not succeed in building a sustainable livelihood, have debts, and/or face stigma and discrimination, may decide to remigrate to look for better economic opportunities. This, however, exposes them to risks, even of being trafficked again.<sup>6</sup>

### Rebuilding lives in the country of origin or in the destination (or again another) country

Depending on their individual situations, trafficked persons may try to rebuild their lives after returning to their country of origin, in the destination country, or, in case of (re)migration, a new country.<sup>7</sup> These options entail different challenges with regard to finding economic opportunities, some of which are reviewed in this section.

In many countries from which trafficked persons originate, there are limited economic opportunities, especially in rural areas or smaller towns. Many of the interviewees who had returned to their country of origin faced limited economic opportunities upon return. Some interviewees in Indonesia and Nepal found work in the informal sector - street vending or running small stalls - but the part-time nature of the work and the low income meant that several reported wanting “a better job.” However, many lacked the requisite skills.

Further, interviewees identified injuries received during trafficking as an obstacle to finding decent work upon return. One Indonesian interviewee's feet injuries, sustained during domestic work in Malaysia, impeded standing for long hours, so that this person subsequently had to give up a new job as a cleaner in Indonesia. A Colombian interviewee who had been trafficked into the manufacturing sector abroad required surgery for injuries to the abdomen and was unable to work. At the time of the interview, this person had fallen behind in the rent, and reported that family members had to miss meals in order to survive.

Also, the stigma and discrimination persons who have returned to their country of origin may face because of ‘failed migration’, may translate into an inability to find work options in their home communities or problems at work with colleagues and/or employers.<sup>8</sup>

**“I want to leave [the shelter] and work and collect some money, because in the worst case that I have to return home to Thailand, I can get some money back with me to start my new life there.”**

Thai interviewee in Western Europe

For interviewees who were still in the country where they had been trafficked to, finding work and achieving financial independence were key priorities as well. One factor that determines the opportunities for trafficked persons to find a job or education in the destination country is their

<sup>6</sup> ILO, *Going back, Moving on: A synthesis report of the trends and experiences of returned trafficking victims in Thailand and the Philippines*, ILO, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> R Surtees, *After Trafficking*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

legal status.<sup>9</sup> Interviewees were uncertain about the length of their stay, while they were cooperating in criminal investigations. Moreover, not all countries grant the right to work during this period.

Some trafficked persons assisted by GAATW Member Organisations in Western Europe were receiving a basic subsistence stipend, but obligations to provide for family back home meant this financial assistance was not always sufficient. Especially in the larger context of the economic recession, high unemployment and high costs of living, assistance interventions may have limited results. In addition, lack of specific language skills and certain occupational skills made it difficult for some interviewees to find work in the destination country.

Overall, regardless of the geographic area in which they settled, trafficked persons, interviewed for the project, and in other research, say that in their post-trafficking life, they mostly need support with building new skills and finding work.<sup>10</sup> Skills training, education and employment opportunities are essential for trafficked persons to break the cycle of revictimization, however, it is critical that they are realistic and meaningful.<sup>11</sup> The next sections set out what the interviewees in the project said about the services offered.

### Vocational and skills training: align with interests, skills, and the local job market

Vocational and skills trainings can be focused on rebuilding a life in the country of origin: on the skills needed to set up businesses or find employment upon return. Or they can be trainings focusing on continued stay in the destination country, like in the case of prolonged stay during criminal proceedings, or in preparation of possible extended residency. Language courses are an example. Vocational and skills trainings can increase trafficked persons' employment prospects, confidence and life skills.<sup>12</sup> Options for training, however, may be inadequate, or unavailable.

#### *Vocational training*

Vocational trainings on offer are often limited in scope, and tend to focus on traditional skills. Interviewees reported having access to a limited number of, often gender-stereotyped training activities, such as, in the case of the interviewed women: cooking classes; sewing; textiles; drawing; and beautician courses. For men, vocational training offered is commonly construction; carpentry; automobile and motorbike repair; and farming.<sup>13</sup>

Interviewees valued training that met their interests and ambitions, and for many that concerned gender-specific training. Several women interviewed in Eastern Europe and Latin American countries, said that beautician and hairdressing courses were highly sought after:

**“The one I would choose would be the course I'm doing in cosmetics because that's an education that will be worth having for all my life; no one's going to take it away from me.”**

Peruvian interviewee in Peru

While some, not all, of the gender-specific trainings may be popular courses, researchers warn against reinforcing gender-stereotypes in any way, including vocational trainings. Gender-

<sup>9</sup> IOM/J van Selm, *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Measures for the Integration of Trafficked Persons*, FIIT Project, IOM, 2013, retrieved 18 July 2015, [http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/FIIT\\_study\\_ENG.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/FIIT_study_ENG.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> A Lisborg

<sup>11</sup> UNODC, *Toolkit to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings*, UNODC, 2008, p. 379, retrieved 18 July 2015, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Toolkit-files/07-89375\\_Ebook%5B1%5D.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Toolkit-files/07-89375_Ebook%5B1%5D.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> R Surtees, *Re/integration of Trafficked Persons*

stereotypes, and other stereotypes for that matter, often are at the basis of the limited opportunities in the home country, and the cause of vulnerability for trafficking. The root causes of trafficking such as violence within the home or community, and a lack of livelihood options in countries of origin, may be exacerbated for women due to gender-based discrimination.<sup>14</sup>

Given the limited activities on offer, restrictions on eligibility for preferred trainings, delays in access to activities, and programmes being full, were a source of frustration. One woman who had been trafficked into the sex sector in Ecuador, was receiving assistance from a religious organisation which prioritised women currently working in the sex sector when offering access to a course in beautician skills, rather than those who had left the sector:

**“I wanted again to do beauty, I really want it, but the nun says no, that it’s for the new ones, for the ones already working, so by that she means that I cannot do it because I’m not working... I want to progress, but the nun (says) no.”**

Ecuadorian interviewee in Ecuador

Chances are that several of such gender-specific trainings put persons into saturated job markets, making it difficult to find a job, and rendering them vulnerable to re-trafficking.<sup>15</sup> Many women expressed their frustration with gender-stereotyped activities, particularly sewing, which were viewed as offering little in terms of real opportunities for decent work. One Indonesian woman had received a two-day sewing course, provided by the Indonesian government to trafficked women, but this had not led to a job. At the time of the interview she had higher hopes of starting a small snack stall in front of her house. Courses did not always meet participants’ needs or expected outcomes. Some interviewees in Latin-America said the trainings did not meet their interests and abilities, causing them to stop, or to conclude it but knowing it was not what they really wanted or needed.<sup>16</sup>

Partnering with individual businesses can provide people with the necessary ‘real life’ work experience, and improve opportunities for employment in the long term. One GAATW Member Organisation arranged for an interviewee to receive training in a private sector establishment after returning to the country of origin. Following completion of the training the person was given first an internship and is now in full-time employment there.

### *Skills training*

For those assisted in destination countries, particularly language training was deemed highly important, not only in terms of negotiating interactions in everyday life in a new country and culture, but because it could help secure employment:

**"This German course was the most important for me. Without a German course, I can do nothing on my own. For example, if I can’t speak German, I couldn’t go to work. I couldn’t get papers to go to work.”**

African interviewee in Western Europe

<sup>14</sup> GAATW, *Beyond Borders: Exploring links between trafficking and labour*, GAATW Working Papers Series, GAATW, 2010, retrieved 20 August 2015, [http://www.gaatw.org/publications/WP\\_on\\_Migration.pdf](http://www.gaatw.org/publications/WP_on_Migration.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> A Lisborg

<sup>16</sup> GAATW, *Towards Greater Accountability: Participatory monitoring of anti-trafficking initiatives*, Regional Report, GAATW, 2015, retrieved 24 August 2015, [http://www.gaatw.org/publications/INFORME\\_REGIONAL\\_LAC\\_GAATW.0825.2015.pdf](http://www.gaatw.org/publications/INFORME_REGIONAL_LAC_GAATW.0825.2015.pdf)

Interviewees reported that even low-wage jobs required a functional level of the language: one interviewee said to have been unsuccessful in getting a job as a dog-walker in the Netherlands due to a lack of language skills. People had access to language training by referral to either a volunteer or a training institute. However, some people reported long delays in referrals and having to pay for classes after their allocated hours ran out. Also, the access to the services appeared to depend on gender. In general, there are less services available to trafficked men than to trafficked women and girls; reason why men more often stay in shelters that are not specifically geared towards trafficked persons. A Togolese man trafficked into the Netherlands, staying in a shelter for homeless people, told that he was lucky that a social worker there was willing to give him Dutch lessons in her spare time: *“That was where I began to learn Dutch.”* Later, he took formal Dutch classes.

Overall, the research confirmed that too often, the types of training on offer do not align with persons’ needs, nor with the local economic situation, thus do not lead to livelihood improvements.<sup>17</sup> Importantly for providers of direct assistance, interviewees had a very clear idea about the skills they needed to secure employment in the labour market:

**“For now the only training provided is limited to handicraft trainings. Apart from that there is not much. The situation has changed now – now you need computer trainings, you need languages”.**

Interviewee in Nepal

#### Support persons with ambitions to access education

**“To get the kind of job you want, you need education.”**

Interviewee in Nepal

Assistance programmes should take into account that trafficked persons will have different desires and ambitions for their lives.<sup>18</sup> It is not surprising given the limited variety of vocational training on offer, that in the interviews and focus group discussions, many men and women, particularly younger women, expressed their desire for formal schooling or higher education. Education was not only associated with better employment opportunities, but also with social standing in communities. A service provider in Eastern Europe explained, that achieving a high school diploma helped mitigate stigma from the community, by serving as an explanation for persons’ absence while trafficked.

Persons who have been trafficked as a child are likely to lack formal education.<sup>19</sup> A number of interviewees had been children when they were trafficked, and got assistance with finishing their basic education, often in the destination country:

**“I continued with my school and finished my secondary school.”**

Interviewee in Eastern Europe

Education programmes are long-term initiatives that offer substantial benefits, but accessing them means overcoming some socio-economic challenges. For example, in Indonesia there are challenges to accessing education due to a lack of a transport system in remote communities and no provision of school materials. In some areas, non-governmental organisations assisted persons

<sup>17</sup> A Lisborg

<sup>18</sup> ILO

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*



to get to school. Safety on the public transport also has been reported as an issue, especially when the victim lives in the same city as the trafficker.<sup>20</sup> A further complication was that some

interviewees said they dropped out of education, due to insults and gossip at school.<sup>21</sup> An Indonesian woman who had been trafficked into the entertainment sector as a child said: *“The teachers support [me], but there are some friends called me ‘lonthe’ (naughty girl).”*

Access to education in destination countries may be hindered, by not, or not yet, having a legal status. A Togolese interviewee trafficked into the Netherlands was able to start a security officer education. However, completing the course became insecure when authorities said the interviewee might need to leave the country: *“My studies will end in May. Then I will need to take my exam. But because the Immigration and Naturalisation Service sent this letter that I will have to leave the Netherlands, I have a problem with my studies. So this will cause another kind of stress.”*

One GAATW Member Organisation assisted two interviewees to complete university by facilitating access to a donor. The donor funded the tuition fees and worked with the interviewees to choose their courses. The Member Organisation also works with private educational institutions to provide free education and support materials, and to integrate trafficked persons into an educational environment that is free of negative attitudes towards them.

For trafficked persons, access to education thus may be hindered by for instance a lack of funds; limited availability of transport or unsafe transportation options; stigma; or an insecure migration status.

#### Give the necessary support in setting up small businesses

**“I want to have a small store, to sell some goods.”**

*Interviewee in Indonesia*

Support with setting up a small business can be an effective means to increase a person’s independence, self-sufficiency, and self-confidence, and has advantages such as providing options to work from home, and increasing status within the family or community. However, running a business can be challenging, and failure in such a venture may have a negative impact on the individual: psychologically, socially, and economically.<sup>22</sup>

Many persons interviewed in Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal, and Thailand, identified seed money and skills training to begin a small business as a priority. In Indonesia, several interviewees wanted to set up small businesses, such as snack stalls, food preparation businesses, and shops, which they could run from home, while continuing to meet their unpaid care obligations to look after children and/or parents or in-laws. However, while monetary assistance can be a good start in supporting new business ventures, it certainly is not enough to guarantee success in setting up a small business, as shared by this Nepali interviewee:

**“They gave me 30,000 rupees to start a shop on the streets. In that shop I and my spouse both worked. At that time, that was the kind of support we required and we got that. But I was very nervous too because I was doing**

<sup>20</sup> See for example the GAATW briefing paper *Unmet Needs: Emotional support and care after trafficking*.

<sup>21</sup> See for further examples on the issue of safety and privacy the GAATW briefing paper *Seeking feedback from trafficked persons on assistance services: Principles and Ethics*.

<sup>22</sup> UNODC, p. 380; R Surtees, *Re/integration of Trafficked Persons*

business for the first time. I made some errors like returning more money to the customers than was required. Because the shop was on the street, when it's raining we were all wet. So there was more loss from the shop which made me very upset, I felt very bad. I am now more experienced than those times.”

Support to set up a small business should include training in basic business skills, such as finance and a business plan, as well as some consultation on the viability of the business in the community. For the support to be effective, initially, a person's experience, education, skills, and commitment to manage a small business should be considered. Assisting organisations may find it preferable to partner with organisations or government agencies that specialise in business training and development.<sup>23</sup>

#### Provide information on and/or assistance with remigration options

Many persons who have been trafficked feel pressure to provide for their families. This led to their decision to migrate in the first place, and may, in many circumstances, result in their decision to stay abroad and look for additional work, or after returning, again migrate for work. This decision is fuelled by concerns of not being accepted by family and community because of returning home without having attained some economic success.<sup>24</sup>

In the interviews with trafficked persons it was clear that those who had returned to their community faced enormous difficulties for several months, or even years, after returning home. The continued pressure to provide for families often remained, while at the same time, the lack of employment options for interviewees remained as well, and/or they did not succeed in keeping a sustainable livelihood. Several persons, who had received very severe injuries while trafficked, had become dependent on family. In addition, many interviewees reported that their relationships with family members and the community were often strained and they felt isolated due to stigmatising attitudes.

For these reasons, trafficked persons may begin looking for other ways out of this life, including (re)migration. In Indonesia, one interviewee told the GAATW Member Organisation having met with a recruitment agency, and the person migrated to Malaysia soon after this research was completed. This same service provider noted that the “number one” request they receive from trafficked persons who have returned home, some of whom had experienced very high levels of abuse and exploitation while abroad, is information in order to help them remigrate. Many trafficked persons are willing to take the risk and remigrate, even into the very sectors in which they had been trafficked. This leaves them again vulnerable to being trafficked. One person interviewed in Argentina had been re-trafficked after a brief return to the home country. Therefore, information on *safe* remigration is paramount. While financial assistance at home may suit some, the pull of more lucrative opportunities overseas will remain in the absence of more highly paid jobs or adequate social protection at home.

It is important to offer assistance to persons who are considering to (re)migrate, so that they can (re)migrate safely and prepared. They should be informed on their rights, and on how to find solutions to problems that may arise during their employment. For example, information on local support organisations that can be contacted may be valuable.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> A Lisborg; R Surtees, *Trafficking of Men, a Trend Less Considered: The case of Belarus and Ukraine*, IOM, 2007, retrieved 12 August 2015, [http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/MRS\\_36.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/MRS_36.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> GAATW, *The Migrating Woman's Handbook*, GAATW, 1999, retrieved 24 August 2015, [http://www.gaatw.org/books\\_pdf/migrating\\_woman\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.gaatw.org/books_pdf/migrating_woman_handbook.pdf)



## Recommendations

While trafficked persons indicate that they mostly need support with building new skills and finding work, there are many challenges in the process of rebuilding their lives, and there is still a lot to be improved in the services of support organisations. Many service providers offer assistance, such as vocational or skills training; (access to) education; business support; and assistance with (re)migration. However, often lacking is a thorough consideration of the interests, abilities, and resources of individuals, a realistic alignment with local employment opportunities, and information on safe (re)migration.

Therefore, GAATW recommends that service providing organisations:

- Check that the training on offer does not reinforce gender stereotypes, particularly gendered assumptions about work.
- Ensure that offered trainings meet the needs and desires of the individuals who have been trafficked.
- Ensure that trainings meet economic viability, and provide persons with skills and experience that can equip them to earn a living wage.
- Education and training programs need to take into account all aspects required to complete the programme: financial and other. This includes tuition fees, but also non-tuition expenses, such as transportation costs, stationery, and books. Furthermore, they include privacy, consideration of possible stigma in the school, safety on and accessibility of public transport, and language needs.
- Consider partnering with educational or commercial organisations that specialise in business training and development, or with groups that can provide numeracy and book-keeping skills training.
- Consider providing support in developing a business plan to determine the economic viability of the proposed business. Also, assessing whether an individual has the capacities and resources to manage a small business might be considered.
- Persons who want to (re)migrate should get assistance to migrate safely - whether through formal or informal channels. Such assistance should ensure that they are prepared prior to departure: that they know about their rights, about the norms and standards in the country of destination, and have contact details of an assistance provider.
- Partner with local businesses, educational institutes, and other possible funders who understand the need of training, education, and business skills to move on in life, and together seek options for support -either financial or in kind, for an individual or for the support provider.